# CHAPTER 119: BACK THEN, EVEN NOW, LOVE UNCHANGING

Streaming tears of blood and gritting his teeth, Juice shrieks.

Emilia cannot stop the goosebumps from running down her spine.
Until a moment ago, a black SOMETHING had been trying to subsume Juice's body. It has stopped gorging on the outside of him, and presently squirms within him.

Juice's body spasms, pitches, beneath his black vestments.
The blood seeping through the thick fabric gives suggestion of how gruesome his state is, and informs that an unimaginable nightmare is unfurling in his interior.

Emilia: “Juice...”

What on earth did Juice put inside him?
And what was that attack which toppled Regulus? It was like she couldn't see what was happening, and gives Emilia a sense of deja vu.
It's almost as if, just a little while ago, she had witnessed the exact same—

???: “You have proven your resolve magnificently. Cardinal Betelgeux Romanée-Conti.”

A breezy female voice interrupts Emilia's thoughts.
The calm speaker is Pandora, looking down at Juice as he breathes raggedly and spits blood. Even while watching Regulus shunt into the sky, her tranquil countenance had remained utterly unshaken.

Pandora: “You have done well to subsume that witch factor, being that you are unqualified. With my name as Pandora, I confer to your resolve and to your ironclad will the seat of SLOTH.”

Juice: “Do you believe that I desire any SUCH SEAT? My present desires total merely to one. Without a moment of regret for my sacrifice, the safety of that family!”

Fortuna and Emilia, gone from the warzone.
Juice had resolved to stake his lifeblood on their escape. Pandora's brows perk up in surprise, when a redness flushes her cheeks, her smile intoxicated.

Pandora: “Love. Very wonderful.”

Juice: “It is an emotion that will forever reside beyond YOUR COMPREHENSION!”

Pandora, persistently transcended and aloof. Juice, prepared to fight to the end.
He supports himself painfully on one knee as he raises his trembling arm, forcing his bloody eyes open wide as he screams:

Juice: “Authority of SLOTH—Unseen Hand!!”

Overwhelming pressure bursts out from Juice's position.
But Emilia's eyes cannot discern the true identity of this force. Juice had merely extended his arm and yelled, yielding no visible changes in the world.
Even so,

Emilia: “The forest's being torn down!?”

Throughout the area surrounding Juice, as if beset by invisible serpents, out spreads the aftermath of destruction. Trees snap, earth shatters, clumps of dirt and grass scatter through the air.

Juice: “Aaau... aaaaAAAAAAAAAA!!”

All while indiscriminately ravaging Juice's surroundings, the destruction answers to his scream as it directs it path toward Pandora. Although faced with demolition akin to an oncoming giant, trampling over the woods, she shows no indications of moving from that spot.
So being, the destruction proceeds on its course, capturing the small Pandora and—

???: “Say.”

Juice: “—!?”

???: “I came here, I'm present here, so what do you think you're doing in moving the situation along without paying the slightest of mind to me? Giving and wantless as I am, I still have to think that about now's a suitable enough time for me to be angry.”

The instant the invisible serpent reaches Pandora, a white figure cuts into the attack's path.
His hair fluttering, Regulus's raised hand has stops the shockwave. An impact which would kill any ordinary person washes over him as he simply stands there, absolutely nothing happening to him.
Or even that is understating it. He had been slammed into the ground with a force strong enough to burst the earth apart, his body supposedly buried in the soil, and forget about injuries: there isn't even a speck of dirt on him.

Emilia: “No way...”

Her hand to her mouth, Emilia is speechless.
His safe return from Fortuna's surprise attack she could at least understand. If he possessed combat ability far exceeding that of Fortuna, then perhaps he had managed to defend against the lethal attack.
But Juice's invisible strike presents a different story. There is no white fog to obstruct Emilia's view this time—she had plainly witnessed Regulus be thrown into the air, and slammed into the ground. He had, undefended, been slammed into the ground.

There was still some million in one chance that it hadn't wounded him.
But the absolute lack of dirt or soil or whatever filth on him is beyond any explanation.
There's some kind of trick, preventing attacks from—no—preventing outside effects from influencing Regulus.

Juice: “Regulus Corneas!”

Regulus: “Can I say how unpleasant it is? The factor has not acknowledged you, and there you are ignoring your bodily collapse to force the thing into submission. You don't think that's an insult to us who reached our seats by way of proper process? That it doesn't wound the unwavering speck of pride I have in myself?”

In line with the swing of Juice's arm, Regulus's face rebounds.
His neck rotates as if he's been punched, but when he promptly returns his head to proper position, not a trace of the blow besmirches his face. He simply furrows his brows in displeasure, undefended as the consecutive punches proceed to batter him.

Echidna: “I don't think staying here will show us any particular developments.”

Juice's offensive, and Regulus' defensive as he mercilessly repels the attacks.
Emilia watches her old friend staking his life in the battle, when Echidna addresses her from behind.
Glancing back, Emilia glares the expressionless witch.

Emilia: “You're telling me to leave? But look at what happened to Juice, how frantically he's trying!”

Echidna: “Though, the question of whether his efforts are going to reach a desired result does leave some room for debate. And unfortunately, I have no intentions of debating with you. It doesn't interest me to torment the weak, and hearing even one extra syllable out your mouth is the pinnacle of unpleasant.”

Emilia: “Then it should be fine for us to stay quiet and watch. I'll...”

remain here, and see Juice's resolve through to the end.
But when she goes to make that assertion, Emilia's own heart keeps her from saying anything.
The hand at her chest fails to touch anything, and she recalls why she came here. It was to challenge the TRIAL and overcome her past, is why.

Emilia is currently witnessing her legitimate past, which she wanted to forget.
Juice's fight here assuredly did happen, and perhaps its outcome is what she ought to watch over, rather than what became of Fortuna and young Emilia.

—But that would taking Subaru's feelings, having seen her off, and Juice's feelings, having attempted to secure Emilia and Fortuna's escape, and betraying both of them.

What happened to Fortuna and Emilia after Juice presented them their escape?
She needed to unearth more of her slumbering, unrecovered past, and reveal the answer.

Echidna: “It seems like even your deficient brain can understand which decision is wiser.”

Emilia: “...You're right. Let's follow me and Mother. Will Juice...?”

Echidna: “Don't worry, it's a battle between Cardinals of Sin. The scales won't tip in either of their favours so easily. It's another story supposing that someone else joins the fight... but, it's inconceivable that she would involve herself in battle anyway.”

The ferocity of Juice and Regulus' fight compounds.
Blood trails from Juice's eyes, his nose, his mouth. Correspondent with the escalation of damage ransacking his insides, the unseen destruction he manipulates shoots up in accuracy and force.
But Regulus remains so unchanged and ordinary that it's abnormal. Even with the destruction showering his undefended form, he merely stands there with a bored expression, looking down upon Juice's resistance.
It practically feels like, if he chose to go on the offensive, the situation's trend would instantly shift.

Pandora: “Hauauh...”

Echidna's gaze spears through to Pandora, her heart racing and expression aroused.
Indeed, it seems that she is not going to involve herself in the fight. A beautiful girl faced with an abnormal battle, panting rather sexually—leaving all that strangeness aside,

Echidna: “I'm changing the scene. —To you and your mother, escaped into the forest.”

Emilia: “—oop,”

Echidna raises her hand and clicks her fingers.
Everything in Emilia's vision warps as the forest scenery shifts, the false feeling of the ground beneath her feet being covered over with something new abruptly leading her to stumble.
She raises her head. No destruction has reached this section of the forest, this familiar spot.

???: “No! Mother, no! Please don't leave me!”

Hearing the shrill voice of a crying child, Emilia springs her head up.
What she faces is a familiar tree—with its inside hollowed out and re-purposed into a room large enough to shelter a small child, what herself and her mother called the PRINCESS ROOM.

Fortuna and crying young Emilia are conversing outside its entrance.
Emilia clings to Fortuna's chest. Fortuna grasps her daughter's shoulders, and frantically,

Fortuna: “Please listen to me, Emilia. Everything's okay. I'll come... yes, I'll deal with this quickly and come right back. So please stay hidden here while I'm doing that. Please.”

Emilia: “No! I don't wanna! Mother Fortuna, you're making a face like Juice did! Like Juice did, what're you gonna do! L-leaving me, what're you... going to...”

Emilia's little hands cling desperately to keep her mother from escaping.
Fortuna should be easily capable of untangling herself from a child's grip if she wanted to. Her reasoning for not cruelly untangling herself from Emilia's hands is evidenced by her amethyst eyes as she gazes at Emilia.

Fortuna is Emilia's mother. So she cannot bat away the hands of her crying, clinging daughter.

Emilia: “Don't leave me! Let me be with you! I won't tell lies any more! I won't break promises! I'll be a good girl, I'll be a good good girl... so don't leave, me...”

Fortuna: “Emilia... Emilia, Emilia, Emilia!”

Not wanting to be separated from her mother, and willing to sacrificing everything so that she does not have to separate from her mother, Emilia shrieks. Fortuna, her expression collapsing with emotion, hugs her daughter tight. If she does not press her daughter's face to her chest as she is, she'd see it.
Her daughter would see her mother's expression, see the overflowing and unceasing tears, see the teardrops wetting her mother's cheeks.

Emilia: “Mother, Fortuna...”

Young Emilia had not seen her mother crying, but older Emilia clearly did.
Emilia had never imagined that her perpetually noble, marvellous, strong, respectable, not even weak in the slightest mother, had ever been so wounded and assuaged with sorrow that she cried such feverish tears.

As she watches her mother cry, the onlooking Emilia hits her limit.

Unable to put her hand to her cheek in time, the tears in her eyes arise one after another.

Having seen this, having seen her mother's face in this instant, she understands.
Not that she had ever doubted it, but truly in this second, she is again convicted.

Emilia: “Mother Fortuna... was, my real mother...”

Her birth mother, whoever she was, doesn't hold any significance to Emilia now.
As if Fortuna's insistence that she was just a substitute could ever make Emilia forget that she was her real mother.
Although spoken by precious and respected Mother Fortuna as they were, these words alone were ones that Emilia could not accept.

Emilia: “I love you, Mother Fortuna...”

As if anyone could say anything to make this feeling bend.

???: “Fortuna-sama—!”

A man's voice calls out to Fortuna from behind as she holds Emilia close.
Fortuna wipes her face with her sleeve, hiding her torrent of tears as she turns to face the speaker.
Her gaze lands on an elf man in lightweight dress.
He is one of the elves who lives in this village, and someone that Emilia knows too.

Fortuna: “Arch, how is the village?”

The man runs over while Fortuna questions him in regular voice. The man, Arch, looks to have noticed that Fortuna was crying, but goes without touching on the topic and shakes his head.

Arch: “It's the same everywhere. The Cardinal's subordinates and the village's men are reciprocating the fight, but...”

Fortuna: “Isn't looking good, then.”

Fortuna lowers her gaze, biting her lips at the poor state of the battle.
Emilia looks anxiously up at her mother, saying nothing as she grips her clothes and merely trembles.
Arch notices her shaking.

Arch: “It's okay. You don't have to be scared, Emilia. Believe in all us villagers, us adults. And besides, your mother is a very strong, very scary person.”

Emilia: “Mm, mm...”

Fortuna: “Arch, was that 'scary' really necessary? Geez...”

Fortuna crosses her arm in indignation. But she does nod to Arch's indirect words of consideration: *We can't stay utterly pessimistic about this*, and gazes at the Princess Room.

Fortuna: “Hiding her here won't work any more, will it.”

Arch: “Frustrating as it is, staying in the forest means they'll find her before long. Could their goal

be...?”

Fortuna: “The seal deep in the woods, likely. Where did they find out about it? And even that woman!”

Seeming to have particular hostility toward Pandora's presence, Fortuna bites her lip in frustration before giving a strong shake of her head.

Fortuna: “It's fine, but anyway, I'm going. I'm the strongest fighter in this forest, this isn't the time for me to be dragging feet over here.”

Arch: “No! We will be the ones to fight! Fortuna-sama, you take Emilia and exit the forest!”

Fortuna: “What will running away accomplish? Have our peacelands stolen from us... that logic isn't going to stop me. Us losing isn't the problem here. The problem here is having them disclose the seal!”[1]

Fortuna beats back Arch's yells with an even stronger tone.
And, embarrassed that she snapped back at him,

Fortuna: “I'm sorry.”

Fortuna: “I know you resent me. There was honestly no reason for all of you to get wrapped up in this. When Emilia and I came... placed burdens you didn't need.”

Arch: “No! As if there could possibly be any one of us who thinks that!”

Fortuna: “Arch...”

Arch responds ferociously to Fortuna's regretful voice, as if this alone is something he must not allow her to say. His face reddens, his long elfin ears tapering back in fury.

Arch: “Please stop constantly excluding us from your problems! With our long lifespans, perhaps it may have only felt like the blink of an eye... but even so! We spent the same time together, saw the same things together! Have you forgotten that!?”

Fortuna says nothing.

Arch: “Who could possibly think ill of you! When we have great debts to you, your brother... to Emilia's mother, how could you ask that we shamelessly forget what we owe!”

His emotions detonating, Arch pleads Fortuna while practically in tears.
The yet-young elf breaths raggedly as he falls to his knees, sniffling as he looks up at Fortuna. She closes her eyes in silence.

Fortuna: “I'm sorry. —Once again, I've invalidated the family I live with.”

Arch: “Fortuna-sama... I-I may have, said too...”

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1 The word used for 'disclose' more commonly means exposing something hidden to the public, but has a second meaning of 'graverobbing' which might(?) have potential to be the correct meaning in this context.
On reflection if you take it extremely literally 'disclose the seal' works fine for both meanings. WONDERS of language.

Fortuna: “No, it was important that you did. I'm sorry, Arch. And thank you.”

Giving kneeling Arch her thanks, Fortuna presents him her hand. After a moment of hesitation, Arch takes Fortuna's hand and quietly stands back up.
Fortuna turns to face Emilia.

Fortuna: “Emilia. You Mother has an important role she has to fill to protect everybody. We're going to be separated for just a little bit.”

Emilia: “D-don't, Mother. I... I...”

Fortuna: “Please. It's only for a little bit, so please listen. Go with Arch, and leave the forest. This forest is... going to be, sooo dangerous soon.”

Speaking to Emilia as she shakes her head in tears, Fortuna glances back to Arch.
Gazed at by her determined amethyst eyes, Arch's skinny body goes rigid.

Arch: “For-Fortuna-sama... I,”

Fortuna: “Arch. You're still young, and have a future. Please take Emilia, and... I know it's a hard world to live in, but there has to be hope.”

Arch: “I... don't say these things as though it's the end! I-I'm staying in this forest to the last, with everybody!”

Fortuna: “Please, Arch, Emilia. She's my, my brother's, my sister in law's, daughter.”

Arch: “—!”

Absent of Fortuna's strength and nobility, this was merely the voice of a frail woman.
Hearing the voice of woman and mother Fortuna, tears stream down Arch's face.
Arch buries his face in his hands as he sobs.

Arch: “It isn't fair...! When you hear something like that, you know it's impossible to refuse...! I, want to fight with everyone! But!”

Fortuna: “I'm sorry. For pushing everything onto children, please forgive us.”

Putting her hands on the shoulders of the crying young elf, Fortuna begs for forgiveness.
Arch says nothing, but accepts Fortuna's request.

Now, the people that Fortuna must persuade here amounts to only Emilia.

Fortuna: “Emilia”

Emilia: “No! I, I wanna be with you, Mother! Please! I ask please! Please, let me be with you! I don't wanna, be alone...”

Fortuna: “You're not alone at all. Listen closely.”

Emilia bawls, unreceptive. She puts her hands over her ears, trying to shut out every word of her mother's goodbye, which makes older Emilia want to pull her young self's cheeks taut.

Not to punish her for disobedience. But so that she cannot escape from a single syllable of any of the words that Fortuna is going to speak.

Fortuna: “Emilia.”

Fortuna squats down. Hugs Emilia.
She takes Emilia's arms in her grasp, stops her from plugging her ears, and when her daughter acts out by pressing her head against her, Fortuna nuzzles her cheek against her daughter's silver hair. As though touching something, someone, more beloved than any other, taking care so that they will not break.

Fortuna: “Your Mother is always right there with you. Right there when you close your eyes, in your memories. Right there when you cradle yourself, in your heart as it grows warm. Right there when you call out, beneath the same sky that your voice echoes. You and Mother are always together. Always, always, forever... together.”

Emilia: “Liar. Liar, liar, liar... You're lying, Mother...”

Fortuna: “Emilia. —Promise.”

Emilia attempts to discard her mother's words as being mere consolation, when Fortuna looks her in the eyes and speaks. The word PROMISE leads Emilia to swallow her breath, shut her mouth.
Led by Fortuna's gaze to her outstretched palm, young Emilia too, places her palm to Fortuna's.

Fortuna: “Emilia and her Mother will always be together. That's what I promise you.”

Emilia: “Y-you'll, really... be with me?”

Fortuna: “Yes, really. More than anyone else in the world, your Mother loves you, sooo much, Lia.”

The tender call of 'Lia' is what leads the dam of tears for young Emilia, for old Emilia, to burst. Sobbing and bawling, two Emilias present and past.

Emilia: “Mother Fortuna... l-love you too... love you, love you...”
Emilia: “I love you. I love you, Mother Fortuna. Love you, sooo much, love you, treasure you...”

The emotions of the two Emilias overlap as they frantically answer to the love directed at them. They strain their voices, press their bodies close to her, to inform that should they do otherwise they will fail to convey, fail to express, all of these feelings in their chests.

Fortuna: “Love you, Lia.”

On her cheeks, eyelids, forehead, Fortuna's soft warm lips touch her.
Although permitted to share touch, to share embrace, Fortuna was someone who had been late to learn to express love as a mother, and never would do such things—making this the moment that Fortuna truly, from the bottom of heart, first accepted herself as being Emilia's mother.

Fortuna: “—I'm counting on you, Arch.”

Arch: “...Understood.”

Having conveyed her absolute love to her daughter, Fortuna stands and calls for the young man.

Arch receives the bawling Emilia from Fortuna, holds her firm, and gives Fortuna one big bow of his head.

Fortuna: “Get away safely.”

Arch: “I will... Yes, I will! I won't let Emilia... won't let this girl be hurt by anybody!”

Fortuna's cheeks relax in relief.
She points to a road deeper into the forest.

Fortuna: “That way. I'm begging you.”

Arch: “—”

Arch breaks into a run, toward where Fortuna is pointing, saying nothing.
In his hold as he sprints through the forest, Emilia peeks her head out from behind his shoulder—to sight her mother as she grows distant. She cries out, but makes no sound.
Fortuna's sharp eyes soften so tenderly,

Fortuna: “—I love you, Emilia.”

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Held by Arch, Emilia looks frantically in the direction where her mother has disappeared.
Like she's begging, that consistently staring like this might make her vanished mother reappear.
Like she's hoping, that perhaps she'll come to follow them.

Arch: “Emilia!”

Emilia's stubborn spirit communicates well to Arch as he holds her small form.
Arch's face turns into a mess as he considers what to tell her young heart, having undergone separation with Fortuna.

Echidna: “—I'm surprised.”

Says Echidna to Emilia, the two running side-by-side in pursuit of Arch.
Still affected by the parting with her mother, and not quite suppressing her weeping, Emilia questions Echidna using only her gaze. The white-haired witch shrugs.

Echidna: “That you didn't stay behind there, and followed your past self without hesitation. I was certain that it'd be like before when watching Sloth, that you'd protract the scene with your mother so girlishly.”

Emilia: “...I know I told you before. I'm here to watch my past through! Mother, and Juice, and everyone... that's why they...”

Echidna: “Mmhm, mmhm. Said something unasked for, didn't I?”

Looking like she did not get the answer she wanted, Echidna shakes her head.
Even Emilia has to feel irritated with Echidna's callousness, but before she can mention it, young

Emilia buries her face in her hands.

Emilia: “Why? Why? How, come this... happened? I-it's, because I... I, broke my, promise... and left the, room...”

Arch: “No. No, Emilia. It's not your fault at all! It's not Fortuna-sama's fault, it's not anybody's fault! There's no need to blame yourself!”

Emilia: “But then, how come? How come, we're separated? Mother... and Juice too, how come... do, do they hate me? Lots of, heaps of people, hate me so, this's why it...”

Her incredibly sudden parting with Juice and Fortuna has cornered Emilia's heart right to the precipice of breaking.
Thinking back on what foreboded this situation, and on her own actions, young Emilia sinks into a sea of self-invalidation.

She broke her promise. She left the room she wasn't meant to leave. She knew about the seal she wasn't meant to know about. It looks like everything that caused this started by her own deeds.

Emilia: “Should I've... stayed there, stayed in the room? If I did, would, nobody be gone... and I could, be with everybody?”

Arch: “Emilia...”

Emilia: “Was, I a bad girl...? Is everybody, in the world going to, hate me... and, I'll be alone?”

Arch: “No... No, Emilia! Nobody, there's nobody out there who hates you. The world isn't here to hurt you. ...The world's here so that everybody can celebrate you!”

Arch frantically tries to persuade the bawling Emilia.
Part of is an attempt to stop Emilia's crying, but a larger part is much like a wish—because he himself would like to believe it.

Arch's shouts strike older Emilia's heart.
It wasn't just Fortuna and Juice. He and the other villagers had all protected her, loved her, reached out to her to make sure she wasn't alone.
It was not until this exact instant that she truly remembered: it had always, always been like this.

???: “You over there—!”

Shouting sharply, somebody slinks into the space before Arch as he runs.
The black-robed character bounds out from a gap between the trees, which prompts Arch to stop immediately and for his gaze to grow wary. But the man raises his hands in response.

Man: “Wait, don't panic! I'm one of Cardinal Romanée-Conti's fingers!”

Arch: “The Cardinal's...!”

Hearing Juice's name from the puffed man in the robes makes relief arise on Arch's face. The man approaches after seeing Arch lose his wariness, and notices Emilia.

Finger: “That girl... then, Fortuna-sama couldn't possibly be...?”

Arch: “There's no need for concern. She's... She has merely entrusted me with Emilia, and left us together. Fortuna-sama is the most skilful of any of us in the village. She will surely defeat the trespassers, and...”

Finger: “...Though I find this hard to state, I'm afraid that's a difficult prospect.”

The man lowers his gaze, his voice weak.
Arch raises his brows. The man sighs, his expression grave.

Finger: “We have confirmed the presence of the Cardinal of Greed, and our Cardinal has entered into combat with him. Were that the only problem and we repelled the extremist members of the faith, it might be possible for us to drive them away, but...”

Arch: “Some other issue has...?”

Finger: “—The witchbeast BLACKSNAKE has been loosed in the forest.”

Arch: “—!?”

Arch is stunned.
He shakes his head in disbelief, gesturing to the forest.

Arch: “That's ridiculous, impossible! The Blacksnake is even less controllable than the White Whale or Sizeable Hare! It's not the White Whale, under Gluttony's command, or the Sizeable Hare, whose course can be guided... the Blacksnake is just a natural disaster which listens to nobody! A catastrophe among catastrophes! How!”

Finger: “...The Witch Cult's Pandora-sama has accompanied him. Pandora-sama cannot go so far as to control the Blacksnake with her authority, but she can lead it to a destination.”

Arch: “Pandora? That isn't a name I've...”

Finger: “She exists in secrecy! In the Witch Cult she is taboo not to be spoken, neither by the Cardinal's faction of moderates nor by the extremists. Now she has come here.”

Arch's shock keeps him from saying a single word.
Arch's failure to sink into despair results from the sensation of the heartbeat of the life in his arms. Results from his knowledge that he is not permitted any pessimism.

Arch: “Fortuna-sama has stated that I am to lead Emilia to her escape. Regardless of what may happen to the forest, this girl... this hope, must be protected!”

Finger: “...I will accompany you. Although I cannot say how much this frail person of mine can assist.”

Arch's persistent will to fight leads the man's crestfallen look to recover into determination.
He casts his robe open, revealing rather stout muscled legs and for his age, breaking into a run as he takes the lead along the path out of the forest.

Finger: “We'll proceed while taking care to avoid the extremists. Now, if we can just exit the forest, prospects should be—”

*brighter.* But in that exact instant,
Something entangles the leg of the man in the lead, leading him to fall. He topples to his side as Arch cries out and panickedly runs toward him.
But the man shouts to the approaching Arch,

Finger: “Stay back!!”

Arch: “—!?”

Finger: “My blunder... but to think it came so quickly!”

The man uprights his fallen body. But, upright himself is all he does. His legs, for some reason, do not move an inch.
Beneath his overturned vestments—marks like black burn wounds besmirch his exposed shins.

Finger: “It's the vile tongue of the Blacksnake! Flee!”

Arch: “But!”

Finger: “I am already beyond saving...”

The man's face rapidly begins to change in appearance.
His skin from the neck up steadily drowns in dark, mottled marks, the eyes of his gentle-looking face bulging open, eyeballs close to falling out as his face sinks in.
His fingers claw at his mottled neck, his mouth spilling massive quantities of yellow froth.

Finger: “ghb, bgbhgh... ahgbh, bgh...”

Immediately following his agonized moan, his eye sockets, his nostrils, his ears, his mouth, every single orifice begins leaking with dingy blood, strangling his life to nothing as it gushes away.
While of course it goes for Arch, with Emilia also being subject to witnessing the pitiful death, neither can keep their usual composure. Even Echidna's expression looks scrunched up in pain.

Arch: “Potpourri of Pestilence... Witchbeast of Blight, the Blacksnake!”

His voice strained, Arch states the name of the man's killer, the beast.
While surely it could not have been in response to that call, a forest silent but for Arch and Emilia's breathing abruptly becomes host to another noise.

The slopping, of a large animal licking its lips.
The slithering, of something long and thin slinking across the earth.

The noise is on a ridiculously incorrect scale, and it's hard to really pin down, but it almost resembles the noise of a serpent faced with prey, its tongue flicking out, as it squirms across the dirt.

Arch: “—Fuck!”

Having guessed the true identity of the sound, Arch realises that himself and Emilia are right in the middle of the Blacksnake's hunting ground.
Although aware that yelling only acts to their disadvantage, he has to yell. He can think of no other methods to rebel against the thing.

Although unsure of where to run, Arch sprints away from the man's course. He has not a single thought for Fortuna's directions any more. Right now, he must escape from this threat. Must protect that what must be protected.

The frantic resistance of that young elf—

Arch: “Ahg—”

—is cruelly crushed as a vile, black tongue ensnares his right ankle.

The areas of bare skin which the tongue licks are besmirched with dark, mottled burn scars.
The instant he sees it, Arch aims his open palm at his foot.

Arch: “...FULA!!”

Without hesitation, he fires a blade of wind to sever his scarred leg from the shin down.
He loses his footing, and props his falling body on a tree trunk. Blood spurts from him, the agonizing pain soldering his brain as he endures, gritting his teeth so hard that they fracture.

Arch: “Humaauh!”

A crack sounds through the air as Arch's severed stump begins freezing over. White mist transpires, Arch shrieking as he forces his bleeding to stop.
His gruesome deeds stun older Emilia silent. Instant decisions, counteracting the pain. And his strength of heart, having not released Emilia from his hold even after all of this.

Emilia: “Arch...?”

With her head pressed to his chest, young Emilia had not witnessed Arch's actions. Neither did Arch have any intention in the least to let her see them.
Even with his face covered in cold sweat, he gives Emilia a clumsy smile.

Arch: “It's... nothing... I'm... all fine!”

Although his speech falters, Arch replies so as to not let Emilia sense anything is wrong.
But cruel fate laughs ever on at the spirit of this noble man.

His leg has been severed, his frantic deeds done to plug the bleeding of his stump—as the uninjured portions of his frozen leg look to dehydrate, fissuring like a plane of earth bereft of water, the damage spreading.
It's as if Arch's leg is dying like a dry wasteland. And it isn't stopping at just the leg.

Arch: “...Emilia. Do you see the white flowers between those two trees?”

Emilia: “...Mm.”

Arch squats down the with the tree supporting his back. Having alighted to the ground, Emilia looks where Arch is pointing, and nods as she spots the white flowers.
Arch wipes the sweat from the brow. Hides his agony.

Arch: “Can, you run to those flowers? Run, past the flowers... go straight... go straight, ahead...”

Emilia: “I, can. I can. But...”

Arch: “Then, get running—”

Although confused, young Emilia now recognizes that Arch is in incredibly irregular straits, her amethyst eyes wavering.
Wavering because she will be alone. Because again, she will lose someone.

Arch: “Everything's okay. Emilia, you, won't be alone...”

Emilia: “Arch...”

Arch: “Now, run off. No matter what you hear, don't look back... run!”

Arch's sharp command makes Emilia's shoulders hitch, and with that, Emilia runs. She withstands the urge to look back, instructed as she is not to do it.
Arch's words, Fortuna's words, Juice's words, all echo through Emilia's brain.

So that she can believe: If she does everything as she is told, everything will go back to normal.
So that she can convince herself: keeping by instructions is the only hope she currently has.

Running away, leaving him behind, Arch watches Emilia disappear into the direction of hope.
He gives a long sigh. Rolls up the sleeve of his jacket.

The dehydration has already covered his legs and waist, having come as far as his abdomen.
He can move neither of his legs, and in fact it seems that just touching them will be enough for them to shatter and disintegrate.
Once the dehydration reaches his chest, gets to his heart, what will happen?

He hears the slithering of the beast, faced with prey.
He hears a slithering, noise like it's plotting to take the fleeing girl, the forest's hope, the significance of Arch's expenditure of the faint life he had left, and steal it.

Arch: “Like anyone could let you get away...”

The slithering stops its retreat.
As if it has regained interest, in the still-living prey.

The noise approaches. Meaning, although sensing that end is approaching, Arch's cheeks relax.
The fact that death is looming in on him means that death is growing distant from the girl.

Arch: “I know she'll be okay, Fortuna-sama.”

The end slithers closer.
He hears it, and although exposing himself to mortal danger beyond parallel, Arch's pride in his achievements leads him to smile.

Arch: “—”

That smile, even though parched arid, remains without ever going dry.

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—Emilia has long passed the white flowers.

Emilia: “Hahh... hahh... hauhhh...”

Her breathing hitches, her frantically asking long strides from her little legs as she dashes through the forest.
All while thinking about her mother and Juice and Arch, focused on the idea that running in this direction Arch indicated is the best thing she can do, not going to consider anything else.

Emilia: “Auhh... aaaaauah!”

She shakes her head.
The tears flow. Desperately, she keeps the sobs from pouring out her lips.

What was happening, and why was it happening?
Everybody knew something, and she didn't know anything.

She didn't know what to do, didn't know a thing. Was there nothing she could do?
Who were the people attacking Fortuna, Juice, Arch, and the others? What could she do that would make them go away? For what goal did they—

Emilia: “The, siel...”

Yes.
Fortuna and Arch had mentioned something. And Juice's talks with Fortuna surely indicated that this object was something important.
Meaning, their goal was?

Emilia: “—auh,”

Emilia's feet as she runs suddenly strike air, and losing sight of the ground, she comes to realise that she has entered into sloping basin.
She immediately reaches out to try and stop herself, but the steep incline gives no aid to the small girl, and on the heels of her momentum Emilia trips, tumbles, falls.

Normally, perhaps she would cry from the scrapes and bruises and stand back up.
But this time, with both her body and mind entirely fatigued, the strike of Emilia's head against the ground leads her to fall momentarily unconscious.

Emilia: “I...”

All of this, when she needs to do something. All of this, when she thinks she's figured it out.
With the flame of duty kindled in her little chest, her consciousness aborts.

—The story shall leave the side of the girl, temporarily to return to the scene of the fight.

To see two fates, and see how they conclude.